



The Unseen Burden of the ADHD Scapegoat

Angie Hurlburt ([00:00](#)):

Hello and welcome to TADD Talks with ADDA. I'm Angie Hurlburt, host of the ADHD Scapegoat Podcast, an advanced certified ADHD life coach at ADHD with Angie. Today I am sharing with you something I call the unseen burden of the ADHD scapegoat. Here's what I mean. Many of us who have ADHD grew up being singled out, criticized, and even blamed for things we couldn't control. Being misunderstood in school by our peers and in the community home may have been the only place you could feel safe in dysfunctional family systems. You don't get that safe place. In toxic families, there's often a scapegoat, one person who gets tagged as the quote unquote problem. And if you had ADHD as a kid and you grew up in dysfunction, there's a good chance that person was you. This burden doesn't just disappear when you grow up.

Angie Hurlburt ([00:48](#)):

It stays with you. It shapes how you see yourself, how you move through the world, and even how you handle your ADHD symptoms as an adult. So in the next few minutes, I am going to break this down into three parts, what ADHD scapegoating actually looks like, how ADHD and scapegoating overlap and make life harder. And one practical strategy you can start using right away to separate what's really your ADHD and what is actually abuse. So the first step is to start with awareness. What does ADHD scapegoating actually look like? So scapegoating happens when one person is blamed for all the problems in the family. If you had ADHD as a kid, your natural ADHD traits often made you an easy target. Maybe you were forgetful, impulsive, emotional, curious, or outspoken. Instead of seeing those traits as part of how your brain works, the people around you exaggerated them, twisted them, and used them against you.

Angie Hurlburt ([01:46](#)):

Why do you think ADHDers are vulnerable to family scapegoating abuse? Well, we're often authentic and curious by nature. We ask questions. We notice things like behavior patterns and others. We call out what doesn't make sense, which threatens controlling our insecure people. Dysfunctional systems are just that Being your authentic self is too much for people who want control because your honesty threatens the lies. They tell our mistakes. Our differences are exaggerated and often given the assumption of malicious intent, while our strengths are minimized, ignored, or twisted into a problem, the result, you grow up feeling confused and misunderstood. You start to believe your experiences don't matter to anyone, like your feelings are invalid and you feel invisible in your own life. That's the unseen burden. Now, let's move into understanding how ADHD and scapegoating abuse get tangled together. So ADHD symptoms and trauma responses can look very similar. Let me give you a few examples. First, emotional dysregulation is when you're told you're overreacting. The ADHD symptom is you have quick



Angie Hurlburt ([02:59](#)):

Emotional shifts, big reactions to small frustrations, trouble calming down. Once you're upset, a trauma response looks like hypervigilance. Strong reactions to perceived threats because the nervous system is wired for survival. They mislabel your overreacting. Instead of recognizing the nervous system, overload is at play. Another example, forgetfulness or distractibility, and you're told you're selfish. The ADHD symptom is that your working memory challenges are getting in the way time blindness and genuinely forgetting tasks or conversations. The trauma response shows up with dissociation and shutting down. When you're triggered, your brain kind of goes offline Under that stress, they say you only care about yourself instead of understanding. It's a brain response, not a lack of love. And what about if you're highly sensitive? You're told to stop being dramatic. I was called Angie Weiner so much that it was written on my high school graduation cake as a quote unquote joke.

Angie Hurlburt ([04:06](#)):

The ADHD symptom of this is heightened sensitivity to noise, textures, or criticism and rejection. A trauma response looks like hyperawareness of tone, facial expressions, or energy in the room. You're always scanning for danger. They just name call by saying You're so dramatic. Instead of recognizing it's either sensory sensitivity or survival instinct. These are exactly the kinds of overlaps that confuse a diagnosis and add to the negative self-talk that adults with ADHD often carry with them for decades. Scapegoating isn't just being misunderstood, which I believed for a very long time, and it doesn't just hurt your feelings. It removes your ability to feel safe, which makes your ADHD symptoms worse. The constant stress, the hypervigilance, the negative self-talk loops, all of that makes it harder to focus, harder to regulate your emotions, harder to remember things. Trauma magnifies ADHD and ADHD magnifies trauma.

Angie Hurlburt ([05:08](#)):

It's a vicious cycle that leaves you feeling stuck. But here's what I want you to take in. These struggles aren't evidence that you're broken. They're evidence that ADHD and abuse got tangled together and that you were blamed for your symptoms. Instead of being offered support, you're not just battling your own ADHD brain, you're battling an entire narrative that's been written about you by people who want you confused so you don't see the truth of how smart and strong you are. And when it's your family, the people who are supposed to love and protect you are the ones that are causing that harm. It's devastating. So what do you do with this information? Here's one strategy to separate the ADHD from the abuse. The next time you feel shame or self blame creeping

Angie Hurlburt ([05:56](#)):

In pause and ask yourself, is this my ADHD showing up? Or is this an old scapegoat story? Someone else told me? Let's say you blurt out something in a conversation before thinking it through. The ADHD explanation is, that's my impulsivity. My brain is quick to act and forgets to pause. It's a real symptom, and with awareness and tools, I can learn how to better manage it. The scapegoat story might be, you're so rude, you don't respect anyone. You always make everything about you. Those are two completely



different realities. Or let's give another example. Let's say you have a strong reaction. Maybe you cry or get angry faster than others expect. The ADHD explanation is emotional dysregulation is happening. Your nervous system feels things more intensely and takes longer to come back to baseline. A totally valid part of ADHD that I struggle with the scapegoat story in your head, you are too sensitive, you're overreacting.

Angie Hurlburt ([06:58](#)):

You just want attention. Again, two completely different assessments of one situation. By naming, which is which you strip away the gaslighting and are able to see the truth more clearly. This builds self-compassion and helps you decide the next step, whether that's using an ADHD tool for support or setting a boundary to protect yourself from further abuse. Just this one self-reflection question. Is this my ADHD? Or is this from my abuse? Can give you clarity, self-compassion, and power. The moment you pause the unseen burden of the ADHD scapegoat is heavy, but it's not permanent. And here's the truth. You're not broken. You're not too much, and you're not their scapegoat anymore. The moment you start separating your ADHD from their abuse, you begin to see yourself clearly. And once you see yourself clearly, you can never be invisible again. I'm glad you joined me today for this brief talk on ADHD scapegoating. Again, I'm Angie Hurlburt, host of the ADHD Scapegoat Podcast and advanced certified ADHD life coach at ADHD with Angie. For more information about my work with adults with ADHD, visit my website, ADHDwithangie.com. You can also tune in now to Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or YouTube at ADHD with Angie. Like, and subscribe to the podcast for more insight on ADHD and scapegoating. Thanks for listening.